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The concept of performability and its application within theatrical tradition

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Translating for the stage or for publication

The process of translating for the theatre has undergone significant changes over the last thirty years. The performative dimension with its specific requirements has partially obscured that which prior to the 20th century was the literary centrality of the text, and has decisively influenced not only translations for the stage, but those intended for literary publication as well.

In accordance with present conventions, in order to translate a text for the stage one must respect the rules of theatrical communication. The text must not obey the characteristics of literature, as would be the case in a publication where the reader has all the time in the world to stop and pause at individual passages in order to reread them. Rather, the director must be provided with a text that can be handled nimbly by the actors and understood clearly and quickly by the audience.

Over the last thirty years, these criteria have shifted from the environment of the stage into that of publishing, going so far as to influencing publications as well. In theatrical publishing today there is a need for translations that remain close to what happens on stage, a situation which is also related to the fact that in Italy[1] beginning in the nineteen-seventies specialized publishing houses – stimulated by the production of performances – connected themselves to theatrical events and thus influenced generalized publishing houses in their respective publication of theatrical texts. The transformation of contemporary theatre itself has also played a not unimportant role in this process, a transformation that, from the nineteen-seventies onward, has tended to be marginalized (and to marginalize itself) within cultural debate.

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[1] In this piece, unless otherwise noted, we will be referring to the Italian context.

For it was as if in those years a paradigm had changed. No longer was it the time when, stimulated by the likes of Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco, Sarte, and Camus (authors who are still sought after by important publishing houses and at the center of cultural discussion even beyond their specific theatrical dimensions), ideological passions conquered and divided large audiences. Beginning with the revolts of the avant-garde, new authors were a phenomenon tied essentially to the language of the stage and were therefore specific, dramatic. Additionally, the path to publication was guaranteed by a number of small publishers, and in particular by a growing publishing industry specialized in performance.[2]

Up until now we have been speaking of conventions and changes, which are rather vague terms seeing that a clear line between theatrical translation intended for publication and translation intended for performance does not exist, much as in the same way rules which are valid exclusively for one context or the other do not exist. The reality is made up of a more complex fabric and, at first glance, seems rather difficult to unweave. It is true, for example, that at least until the end of the nineteen-seventies the most important writers for the theatre were being published by the major publishing houses and for a wide audience. This does not mean, however, that such translations were thought of exclusively in terms of their readability and, as such, were thus useless in terms of eventual performance. There are certain texts from Brecht published by Einaudi that were translated *very well* for the stage as, for example, Emilio Castellani's[3] version of *The Life of Galileo*, which is still used in performances today; on the other hand, however, – to remain with Brecht – other versions simply were not, as is the case of Castellani's version of *The Threepenny Opera*[4] which does not work for the stage at all and is why Strehler came up with his own ver-

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[2] The most significant date is 1979 with the birth of *Il Patalogo* – edited by Franco Quadri for Ubulibri, the large yearbook of theatre and performance that collected the avant-garde and new Italian and European theatre.

[3] Cfr. Bertolt Brecht, *Vita di Galileo*, trans. by Emilio Castellani (Turin: Einaudi, 1963).

[4] The first version of Castellani's translation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* was published in 1946 by Rosa e Ballo, Milan, and was republished by Einaudi in 1951.

sion together with Gaipa. In this complex portrait, however, it is undeniable that over the course of the last few decades, stage criteria have become ever more important, even if we still must clarify what exactly they are and what sphere of application they have.[5]

In the theoretical environment too, considerations of translation have given great importance to the demands of the spectacle. The discussion has been accompanied by two concepts of Anglo Saxon origin, that of *speakability*, and that of *performability*. In general, *speakability* refers to the quality of the word in the theatrical context, how it is uttered, and whether it can be easily pronounced by an actor and understood by the audience. *Performability* refers to the coherence of the text with the dimension of the mise-en-scène; in other words, the performance, its movements, the play of the set etc. These terms have not been the objects of precise definition, and have often been used in an axiomatic and interchangeable manner without a definitive field of application; taken as indisputable reference points; or employed simply to justify particular choices. In any event, reflections upon these terms have not brought about the identification of clear criteria or verifiable boundaries.[6]

The version commonly attributed to Strehler, even if it carries the name of Ettore Gaipa, (and with musical and scenic adaptations by Gino Negri and Strehler) was published by Cappelli, Bologna, in 1961.

[5] Publishing houses like Ubulibri, la Casa Usher, Melangolo, and Gremese publish texts that are to be produced on stage by the same translator in versions that are often identical to those published, and often in conjunction with theatrical productions. More generalized publishers sometimes follow this example by publishing foreign theatrical texts edited by directors or translators connected to the productions.

[6] Susan Bassnett affirms the vagueness of the terms "performability" and, in part, "speakability". Cfr. Susan Bassnett, *Ways Through the Labyrinth*, in *The Manipulation of Literature*, edited by Theo Hermans (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 101: "What is more problematic is the notion of 'performability', the implicit, undefined and undefinable quality of a theatre text that so many translators latch on to as a justification for their various linguistic strategies". See also Susan Bassnett, *Still Trapped in the Labyrinth: Further Reflections on Translation and Theatre*, in *Constructing Cultures, Essays on Literary Translation*, edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), p. 95. Recently, even Sue Joseph Che has treated the terms as substantially interchangeable, but proposing a large debate on Bassnett's new positions. Cfr. Sue J. Che, *The Performability and Speakability Dimensions of Translated Drama Texts*, in "inTRAlinea" (2011), n. 13.

In the past, the most strident advocate of stage-oriented translation was Susan Bassnett, also a leading English theorist in the areas of journalistic and literary translation. But it was Bassnett herself, reflecting upon decades of research, who was to make a 180 degree turn, and who began to criticize the excess of spectacular vocation as well as to point the finger precisely at incorrect usages of the concept of *performability* (and, in part, *speakability*) with an evident return to a reconsideration of the text as both point of departure and arrival for the translator, before, that is, its performative dimension.

In this piece we shall dedicate ourselves to identifying what constitute the parameters of the *speakability* of the theatrical word. Even if some of the reasons for Bassnett's about-face are understandable, an extremely simple fact cannot be ignored: if a translation is unsuitable for performance, it must be changed or even redone. This means that there are some characteristics of what we would define as *theatrical dialogue* that must be respected, even if allowing for a degree of variability from performance to performance, something which by this point is demanded by publications as well. This variability of parameters must not necessarily constitute a problem, and not only concerns the theatre, but fiction, poetry and so forth, and seems a rather intrinsic part of the act of translation itself. As regards *performability*, we shall see that the matter is more complex, and that in the present work it is difficult, in effect, to establish any precise parameters.

The theatre between poetry and performance

Emphasis on the performative aspect of theatre has illustrious origins. In the 20th century the evolution of theatrical disciplines shifted interest from the text-as-literature to the text-as-spectacle. The birth of theatre direction in a modern sense; the major theories of acting, from Stanislavski to Brecht; the theories of scenic space; of movement; and of the visual dimension have all contributed to a consideration of the theatre as the realization of a dialectic between an author's written text and its dramatic realization in the work of a group of actors together with a director and other professionals.

This very same concept of theatre as direction-based theatre is perhaps the *summa*, positive or negative depending on one's point of view, of 20th century drama's evolution. To the creative work of the author we must add that of the director and the actors, the clothing designer, and the set designer. Today it would be overly simplistic to consider the theatre as the uniquely creative fruit of the author of a text, even if only for the simple reason that every theatrical text, at least potentially, contains the whole multifaceted dramatic knowledge of an entire age.

Even in recent times attention to the theatre as spectacle has found prominent defenders. Beginning in the nineteen-seventies a number of semiologists working in the Italian field like Keir Elam, Alessandro Serpieri, Marcello Pagnini, Paola Gulli Pugliatti, and Marco De Marinis analytically investigated the relationships between the written dramatic text and that which had been defined as the "performative text". It is sufficient to recall Gulli Pugliatti's well-known definition which stated that the theatrical text "nasce come trascrizione linguistica di una potenzialità scenica",[7] a definition constituting the most radical reversal of any literary centrality whatsoever. Having been subordinated to the realization of the scene, the text as such is incomplete, unrealized, and it contains, at least potentially, the characteristics of that second indispensible phase which is the mise-en-scène. The written text is there to be performed; on its own, it would simply be a hybrid.

The performative dimension is at the heart of theatre's specificity even for Aristotle who had defined it in his *Poetica* in opposition to the narrative dimension. Aristotle had identified two distinct modalities within artistic expression: the diagetic, or poetic-literary one, and the mimetic one of theatre, which was based on an interpretation *in presentia*. At heart, Aristotle is in this sense the godfather of modern semiotics because he puts representation, and not the text, at the center of theatre. In recent times Benveniste has taken up Aristotle's distinction

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[7] Paola Gulli Pugliatti, *I segni latenti: scrittura come virtualità scenica in King Lear* (Florence: D'Anna, 1976), p. 18: "Comes into being as the linguistic transcript of a potential scene". Unless otherwise noted, translations by the present translator.

again, analyzing it from the point of view of modern linguistics. Elam refers to it explicitly in his essay on the semiology of theatre:

> It might be helpful here to recall Émile Benveniste's classic distinction[8] between histoire, the 'objective' mode dedicated to the narration of events in the past, which eliminates the speaking subject and his addressee, together with all deictic references, from the narration; and 'discours' the subjective mode geared to the present, which indicates the interlocutors and their speaking situation. Histoire abstracts the énoncé – the utterance produced – from its context, while discours gives prominence to the énonciation, the act of producing the utterance within a given context. Beneviste's distinction has notable methodological consequences for the analysis of the drama. For while narrative texts – or at least classical narratives – are cast predominantly in the form of histoire (they refer to past events and are relatively lacking in indications of a concrete situation of utterance), the drama is invariably presented in the form of discours, a network of 'pragmatic' utterances or énonciations rather than a series of abstracted énoncés. What this suggests is that the adaptation of literary-critical and, above all, narratological models to the drama, whereby it is reduced to a set of énoncés and becomes just 'another narrative art, one of several modes in which mankind has learned to present a story',[9] will inevitably sacrifice the very level – that of pragmatic discourse – at which it characteristically unfolds.[10]

As Serpieri purports as well, narrative privileges the spoken while the theatre "è istituzionalmente vincolato al processo di enunciazione; ha bisogno di un contesto pragmatico; ha una as-

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[8] Cfr. Émile Benveniste, *Problemi di linguistica generale*, trans. by Maria Vittoria Giuliani (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1971), p. 285ff.

[9] Lynn Alternberd - Leslie L. Lewis, *A Handbook for the Study of Drama* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 1.

[10] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2nd edition, p. 129.

sialità temporale sempre basata sul presente; il suo spazio è la *deissi*".[11]

But does this emphasis on the spoken, and therefore on pragmatic phenomena connected to context, suggest an insurmountable divide between the poetic-literary text and the theatrical text? The reality is more complex and difficult to define. There are some both ancient and modern modalities of the theatre in which the spoken remains very close indeed to the poetic-literary dimension. For example, the expressions of the Greek chorus interact with narrative events, but do not in general have any pragmatic consequence on the facts and serve more as a type of commentary with strong poetic accents. We could say the same thing as regards certain textual mechanisms of the Epic Theatre, not to mention verse drama, classical French theatre, and so on. Neither the theatre as a whole nor everything within the theatre presents characteristics all that radically different from the literary dimension. Pietro Trifone, also referring to Serpieri, has written:

> La relazione reciprocamente condizionante con l'evento spettacolare colloca il testo drammatico «dentro e fuori, allo stesso tempo, dei generi letterari strettamente intesi». Non solo dentro né solo fuori, ma appunto dentro e fuori: sarà quindi euristicamente opportuno richiamarsi sia agli specifici elementi distintivi della scrittura drammaturgica (fenomeni del parlato, regole e tattiche conversazionali, rapporti con la scena e con il pubblico) sia ai suoi ineludibili legami con la scrittura letteraria, e particolarmente con certi filoni della letteratura.[12]

We will add here that there is not the slightest contradiction between the spoken dimension (and here all of the theatre is included)

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[11] Alessandro Serpieri *et al.*, *Come comunica il teatro: dal testo alla scena* (Milan: Il Formichiere, 1978), p. 15: "[The theatre] is institutionally tied to the process of enunciation; it requires a pragmatic context; it has a temporal axis forever based on the present; its space is the *deictic*".

[12] Pietro Trifone, *L'italiano a teatro*, in *Storia della lingua italiana*, edited by Luca Serianni and Pietro Trifone (Turin: Einaudi, 1994), vol. 2, p. 9: "The reciprocal condi-

and poetry, as long as we depart from the presupposition that prior to the industrial diffusion of print, poetry in its reception was a predominantly oral phenomenon. We can therefore affirm that theatre has a connection to the poetic dimension and at the same time a strict interdependence with spoken dialogue, as was obvious before the advent of Gutenberg.

Susan Bassnett's about-take and the stakes

Susan Bassnett, who knows Italian culture quite well, has referred many times to the same semiologists,[13] but in the past most often called attention to the so-called "gestic text"; that is, to that Stanislavskian idea according to which every text includes a gestic subtext within itself, a profound trace in which a second drama is detectable, a drama made up of gestures, movements, mimetic expressions, intonations compatible with the emotive universe created by the text.

According to the early Bassnett, it was to this gestic subtext that the translator had to refer. However, after years of having supported the absolute importance of that universe of potential expressions that referred back to the mise-en-scène, around the nineteen-nineties she began to write rather self-critical works, among which factors one with the rather explicit title: *Translating for the Theatre: The Case Against Performability*.[14]

tioning relationship with the performative event connects the dramatic text both 'inside and out, and at the same time, to literary genres in a strict sense'. Not only inside, not only outside, but precisely inside and out: it will thus be heuristically opportune to recall both specific distinctive elements of dramatic writing (phenomena of the spoken, conversational rules and tactics, relationships to the stage and to the audience) and its inescapable ties to literary writing, and particularly to certain threads within literature".

[13] Cfr. Susan Bassnett, *Ways Through the Labyrinth*, cit., p. 94. We are referring to Keir Elam, Alessandro Serpieri, and Paola Gulli Pugliatti. Marco De Marinis, rather, is a particular case, which represents a more extreme position of the absolute priority of the performance on the text.

[14] Cfr. Susan Bassnett, *Translating for the Theatre: The Case Against Performability*, in "TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction", IV (1991), n. 1, pp. 99-111.

Bassnett's new positions are based on the following points:

1) The translator cannot pass from a text written in language A to a dramatic text in language B without completing an impossible task; namely, the ability to predict how that translation will be realized on stage, a realization that is dependent upon a director and group of actors, and not the translator. Thus, the gestic subtext inserted into the dramatic text cannot be the primary character of the translation.

2) If the proper translation of a theatrical text can be realized *only* in the performative text, then the translator would simply be engaged in the rather unhappy, and not very important, task of translating an incomplete text from the source culture into an incomplete text for the target culture. Clearly, the written dramatic text produced by an author enjoys an autonomy and completeness; in other words, its own textual realization. This is also because it has been adapted to reading and is often published for the audience.

3) The term *performability* is a generic concept that resists any further definition, and is generally employed by translators and critics as a kind of self-justification, above all in Anglo Saxon contexts where translations are heavily adapted according to conventions that must also adhere to economic-productive criteria.

Taken individually, Bassnett's observations are justified but leave us completely divested of a theory of theatrical translation if we do not attempt to understand just how a translator is expected to negotiate the relationship between text and performance. Additionally, we cannot suddenly return to the comfortable certainties of the 19th century when the theatrical text was a product of literary culture and, precisely as such, was analyzed. Bassnett, furthermore, does not radically reject the concept of *speakability*, which thereby remains a characteristic of the translation of dramatic text. She simply rejects the indiscriminate use of the terms and, above all, of that of *performability*. How should one arrive, then, at a precise definition of the "performability" of the theatrical word? This is what is at stake. My hypothesis is that, departing from the specificity of the theatre, as we have indicated, one can derive a specificity of theatrical translation which, however, must remain distinct from other literary phenomena.

Theatrical dialogue

In order to understand where the performability of the theatrical word is put to a hard test, we must concentrate on those aspects where it is subjected to extreme pressure, that is, in *theatrical dialogue*. Even if there is a widespread habit[15] of identifying theatrical dialogue with drama *tout- court*, we prefer to maintain our distinction, for not all of the theatre demonstrates these dialogical characteristics. Our hypothesis is as follows: any time we concern ourselves with *theatrical dialogue* we should translate for the stage in a speakable and performative manner. In other cases, by nature secondary with respect to Aristotelian mimesis, we must confront orality in multiple forms, including that of poetry, as the theatre itself undeniably belongs to the field of orality.

In theatrical dialogue the translator must grapple with the elaboration of interchanges in lines through which the actions of a drama are expressed. At times one feels that a scene's dialogue reproduces normal conversation. The actors are speaking just as normal people would. It is not this way in reality, of course, and this is the result of good scenic expression. The first thing that must be done therefore is to isolate the differences between normal spoken conversation and theatrical dialogue. Discovering these differences, we can identify to which type of "spoken" the translator must conform.

This argument has been the object of various linguistic and semiotic studies. First and foremost is that of Nencioni (1976), which makes a distinction between the "spoken-spoken" in everyday conversation, the "spoken-written" in the dramatic text, and the "spoken-performed" in the stage text. Nencioni affirms

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[15] In general, all of those who do not take into consideration post-dramatic theatre (see below) consider dramatic form based on theatrical dialogue to be canonical, and all other forms to be substantially less important examples. It is this way for Serpieri, Gulli Pugliatti, Elam, and also to a degree for a pure linguist like Giovanni Nencioni in *Parlato-parlato, parlato-scritto, parlato-recitato*, in "Strumenti critici", LX (1976). Marco de Marinis is of the opposite opinion. We shall maintain the distinction above all in the technical and translational sense.

Nel dramma 'classico' [...] tutto è previsto dall'autore e dal regista: dalla situazione areferenziale, preordinata nella sua totalità, alle battute dei singoli personaggi; ciò che rende di solito irrealmente calzante e 'pulito' il parlato degli attori [...]. Il parlato scenico è dunque, nella nostra fattispecie, un parlato programmato, al quale possiamo applicare senza scrupolo l'attributo di 'recitato', purché s'intenda nel senso della esecuzione di un parlato programmato.[16]

Here we must recall Trifone and his essay on the language of theatre where he states:

Il parlato della commedia si fonda generalmente su un testo scritto e presenta quindi un grado di elaborazione maggiore del parlato reale, da cui del resto si distingue nettamente per presupposti, modalità e intenti, che sono quelli specifici della comunicazione teatrale. […] I messaggi espliciti che i personaggi si scambiano all'interno della scena sono fittizi e hanno la funzione di mediare i messaggi impliciti dell'autore al pubblico. Di qui l'ambiguità di un tipo di discorso che è quasi un 'dire a nuora perché suocera intenda'.[17]

But perhaps Elam summarizes the most important characteristics of theatrical dialogue best. In his *Semiotics of the Theatre* he high-

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[16] Cfr. Giovanni Nencioni, *op. cit.*, p. 49: "In 'classical' drama […] everything is foreseen by the author and the director: from the referential situation, preordained in its totality, to the lines of single characters; that which normally renders what is spoken by the actors unnatural and 'clean' […]. The scenic spoken in our case is, in any event, a programmed spoken to which we can scrupulously apply the attribute of 'acted' as it is intended in the sense of the execution of a programmed spoken".

[17] Cfr. Pietro Trifone, *op. cit.*, p. 82: "In comedy, the spoken is generally based on a written text and therefore presented with a greater degree of elaboration than that which is spoken in reality; from this, one can neatly recognize presuppositions, modalities, and intentions, which are those specified by theatrical communication. […] The explicit messages that the characters exchange within the scene are artificial and have the function of mediating the author's implicit messages to the audience. This is where the ambiguity of a type of discourse arises that is almost like 'kicking the dog and meaning the master'".

lights the differences between natural conversation and dramatic dialogue.

That which Nencioni calls the "carattere programmato" (programmed character) of theatrical dialogue is responsible for the following phenomena:[18]

a) *greater syntactic order*: theatrical dialogue does not present the inconsistencies, the drops, nor the syntactic ruptures of normal conversation;

b) *greater informative intensity*: there is a densification, at times a compression, of the information spread which would be inconceivable in spontaneous conversation;

c) *greater illocutionary purity*: the participants' intentions involved in communication are very clear (or intentionally ambiguous) and immediately comprehensible, as opposed to that which can happen in normal conversation;

d) *absolute control of conversational exchanges* because theatrical conversation develops in an ordered and fluid fashion, everyone knows when they are to speak, etc.;

e) *greater textual coherence*, in the sense that the theatrical text has a very strong semantic density in which arguments are structured and articulated well and in which everything appears interconnected in a systematic way.

The following categories of Elam's are less tied to the preordained character of the dialogues and more to the inner characteristics of theatre:

f) *proairetic coherence*, which possibly represents the most intimate peculiarity of the theatre; that is, the synchronization between the dialogue and the development of the dramatic action. The dialogue and the actions proceed according to a synchronism that is also responsible for the rhythm imposed upon comedy;

g) *referential coherence*, in the sense that everything said within the theatre rigorously refers back to selected referents, either visible on stage or alluded to by the story;

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[18] Cfr. Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, cit. For a more detailed analysis, see p. 184ff.

h) greater *discursive clarity* because the dialogue must be perceived in an immediate manner so as not to impede upon the performance's rhythm of visual reception;

i) greater *logical coherence*, in the sense that everything said in relation to what is shown demonstrates a convincing logic to which everything returns;

j) *rhetorical-stylistic coherence* that we would never encounter in everyday conversation.

His concept of 'followability' is very interesting and was developed to explain various concepts, above all those of *discursive clarity*, *proairetic coherence*, and *syntactic order*. Basically, the particular communicative context (the presence of spectators in the theatre often at a great distance from the stage) and the bond between dialogue and narrative action force the theatrical word into being clear, direct, and easily comprehensible – in a single word, 'followable' – by the spectators without much difficulty. As you can see, here we are very close to the concept of *speakability*, that is, the speakability-performativity of the theatrical word.[19]

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[19] It is worth remembering how Giovanni Nencioni (*op. cit.*, p. 45) identified the conditioning role of the audience *present* to be one of the peculiar characteristics of theatre: "Ma bisogna aggiungere che nel teatro, e in ogni tipo di teatro, il destinatario ha maggior peso che in qualsiasi altra comunicazione letteraria. Egli è presente fisicamente e può fare assegnamento su due organi di percezione, la vista e l'udito […]; l'autore, il regista, gli attori devono commisurare il testo e la recitazione alle medie capacità percettive e memorizzatrici degli ascoltatori, e interessarsi delle conseguenze parafrastiche, se proprio non vogliono ributtarli. Il pubblico dunque condiziona profondamente tutti coloro che concorrono a realizzare lo spettacolo: oltre l'autore e quindi il testo, gli esecutori tutti, regista, scenografo, attori, tecnico del suono, macchinisti, senza dire dell'architetto che progetta il teatro; li condiziona, come ricevente destinato, assai più di quanto il ricevente fortuito non condizioni una situazione colloquiale". ("But it is necessary to add that, in the theatre, and in every type of theatre, the receiver is of greater importance than in almost any other literary type of communication. He is physically present and receives through two organs of perception, sight and hearing […]; the author, the director, the actors must measure the text with the acting to the listeners' average perceptive and memorizational capacity, and take an interest in the paraphrastic consequences if they do not want to have them be rebutted. The audience, then, profoundly conditions all of those who come together to realize the performance: in addition to the author and thus the text, all of the executors, director, scenog-

Theatrical dialogue is therefore a kind of hybrid that has a structure similar to natural conversation but that obeys a dramaturgical objective detectible in its strong textual cohesion, in the coherence of what is said, in its discursive clarity, and in its illocutionary dimension. Conversation takes place against a backdrop of dramatic or comedic events that it itself accompanies and obeys a logic and ends that transcend the individual lines. This dual level of dramatic story and conversational act leads the translator to having to assume a multiple perspective. The lines are logical to the encounter or confrontation between two characters. At the same time, however, they always refer back a complex event that is in the process of being clarified, and it is to this event that the lines constantly allude. Indeed, the spectator may already be aware of what the event is, above all in classical theatre, and in such a case, be expecting it. Additionally, the dramatic arguments must be transmitted in an easily comprehensible manner in order to both respect the mimesis of the spoken and to guarantee the spectator's immediate comprehension; for the spectator must not be distracted from the development of the action by too elaborate a linguistic level. Therefore, a certain closeness to the spoken must be retained along with the capacity to articulate and express the arguments of the drama and all in the service of dramaturgical development. Dramatic dialogue, if you will, is a straitjacket of communicative strength within which a text is deployed that can be packed tight with information and argumentation.

Let us take as an example the textual density of one of the opening lines of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*. In general, to the translators' great fortune, most of the dialogues do not have the concentration of information like the one we will present. But sometimes the author, especially at the beginning of a play, will introduce the audience to a complex theme within the frame of simple dialogue between two characters. In these cases the relationship between heavy conceptual expression and the imitation of normal

rapher, actors, sound technician, drivers, not to mention the architect of the theatre itself; the audience, as the destined receiver, conditions much more than the receiver conditions a colloquial situation").

conversation force the translator to produce a rather densely elaborated work.

Brecht, in our example, puts a discourse on war into the mouths of a military recruiter and a marshal, the principal subtopics of which are as follows: a militaristic vision of conflict as an antidote to disorder and the refutation on the part of the populace of the disadvantages of a wartime economy. And this is all a means of setting up the later introduction of the play's protagonist, Mother Courage: a person who has benefitted quite profitably thanks to the war, but one who hopes to get away with it all without losing a thing, least of all her children.

As we shall see, this opening discussion between the recruiter – who is lamenting how difficult it is to get young people to enlist – and the marshal – who is gushing over the almost salubrious advantages of the order that war imposes – presents a series of complex arguments, but ones that have to be delivered both comprehensibly and in direct and engaging language in just a few lines. The discussion takes place in a barren, frozen countryside at the edge of a city. The two soldiers have just one objective: to enlist a few young boys. And it is shortly thereafter that they meet Mother Courage and her children.

Below we shall present two versions of the opening of *Mother Courage and Her Children*: the first version is that which was used in the recently staged at the Piccolo Teatro of Milan (the column on the left); the second is the one published by Einaudi (the column on the right), which the director expressly excluded. It is a matter of two apparently legitimate versions, but, at the same time, clear testimony to the different expectations a theatrical production and a traditionally literary publication have:[20]

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[20] The translation used in the staging at the Piccolo Teatro of Milan in 2005 is that of Robert Menin. The Einaudi translation is by Franco Fortini and Ruth Leiser and dates from 1963. A comparison between the staged version and the published version could be an excellent base of analysis of the differences between the two modes of reception.

Arruolatore Ma come si fa, in un postaccio così, a tirar su una squadra? Certe volte, maresciallo, mi viene da tirarmi un colpo. Entro il dodici del mese devo mettere assieme quattro drappelli per il generale, ma gli uomini da queste parti sono talmente perfidi che ti si guasta proprio tutto, anche il sonno. Mettiamo che ne individuo uno, lo squadro per bene senza farmi notare, faccio finta di non vedere che ha spalle da femmina, e vene varicose, lo porto a bere finché si sbronza, lui firma, non mi resta che pagare la grappa, ma ecco, il tizio esce per pisciare, gli vado dietro perché qualcosa mi puzza: sparito, hoplà, come un pidocchio sotto l'unghia. Non mantengono la parola data, non c'è più fede, senso dell'onore. Io qui ho perso la fiducia nel genere umano, maresciallo.

Reclutatore Come fa uno, qui, a raccapezzarsi una squadra ? Maresciallo, di tanto in tanto mi succede di i pensare al suicidio. Per il dodici devo presentare al comandante quattro drappelli; ma, da queste parti, la gente è tanto perfida, che la notte non riesco più a dormire. Metti caso che ne abbia scovato uno; e abbia subito capito il tipo; e abbia fatto finta di non accorgermi che è stretto di costole e che ha le vene varicose; e l'abbia sborniato ben bene; ecco che ha già firmato; ormai non c'è da far altro che pagare la grappa; e quello esce fuori dall'uscio, e io dietro, perché c'è qualcosa che non mi persuade; difatti è proprio così, se l'è battuta come il pidocchio sotto l'unghia. Qui non conta parola di galantuomo, non ce né fedeltà, né fede, né amor proprio. La fiducia nell'umanità, io l'ho persa qui, maresciallo.

Maresciallo Si vede proprio che da queste parti la guerra manca da un pezzo. E la morale infatti ne risente. La pace crea confusione, solo la guerra porta l'ordine. In tempo di pace il genere umano non conosce più limiti. Si fanno un sacco di porcherie, uomini… bestie... La gente si ingozza senza ritegno, pezzi di formaggio su pagnotte di pan bianco, e poi ancora una bella fetta di lardo sul formaggio. Quanti giovani, e quanti cavalli ci sono in questa città, chi può dirlo, nessuno li conta più. Io ho visto dei posti in cui la guerra mancava anche da settanta anni, le persone non avevano più neanche un nome, non si conoscevano più. Solo quando viene la guerra si fanno elenchi precisi, si tengono registri in ordine, le scarpe in balle, il grano in sacchi, gli uomini e le bestie vengono contate a dovere e poi portate via, perché tutti sanno, senza ordine niente guerra!

Maresciallo Si vede che è troppo tempo che non hanno fatto guerra, da queste parti. Allora, dico io, come volete che ci sia una morale? La pace è solo disordine; non c'è che la guerra per metter ordine. In tempo di pace, l'umanità cresce in modo incontrollato. Con uomini e bestie si fanno porcherie come se niente fosse. Tutti ingozzano quel che gli pare, un pezzo di formaggio sul pan bianco, e poi giù, anche una fetta di lardo sul formaggio. Quanti giovanotti e quanti cavalli ci saranno in questa città, Dio solo lo sa; nessuno li ha mai contati. Io sono arrivato in certi posti, che non c'era stata guerra forse da settant'anni e gli uomini non sapevano nemmeno come si chiamavano, non sapevano chi erano. Soltanto dove c'è guerra ci sono elenchi ben ordinati, liste di nomi, ogni cosa al suo posto: le scarpe in balle, il grano in sacchi, gente e bestie li contano proprio bene, e poi li portan via. Perché, si sa: senz'ordine, niente guerra!

The macroscopic differences between the two translations arise from the register adopted to the lexical choices, the discursive clarity, the informative density, and the spoken. There has been an increase in explication in the translation used for the stage, as the director hoped to render the message, which he felt too unclear, more transparent: in the left-hand version one sees that the boy has been "roped in" by the recruiter, and after having gotten drunk, goes "to have a piss"; this is absent from Brecht's version, which speaks only about a boy who gets drunk and then, with some excuse, exits the scene. The canonical excuse, understood within the German-speaking realm, is not obvious to a director today and needed to be explained for the Italian context. A detailed analysis at the micro-textual level here would take up far too much space. We shall cite only a few examples of insufficient speakability in the right-hand side Einaudi version. There are a series of expressions that today are too unclear (*raccapezzarsi una squadra*); quasi regionalisms (*la gente*, *se l'è battuta*); useless verbal redundancy (*mi succede di pensare al suicidio*; *la notte non riesco a dormire*); syntactical choices derived from the written (*ne abbia scovato uno*); too little textual density (*difatti è propio così*); etc. But we shall discuss these problems in the following paragraph.

Morpho-syntactical characteristics and stylistics of performability

If Elam, with his analytical categories, has given us a model of the differences between what is spoken on stage and normal conversation, we must now investigate whether morpho-syntactical characteristics and stylistics of performability exist to which translators refer.

We thus require a recent investigation of a *corpus* of contemporary Italian plays conducted by a linguist. We are referring to Silvia Calamai's essay *Dalla parola a palcoscenico: le lingue di Chiti, Malpeli, Maraini, Russo, Scimone, Tarantino*,[21] which sought to record the salient

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[21] Cfr. Silvia Calamai, *Dalla parola al palcoscenico: le lingue di Chiti, Malpeli, Maraini, Russo, Scimone, Tarantino*, in *Varietà dell'italiano nel teatro contemporaneo*, edited by Stefania Stefanelli, Atti della giornata di studio (Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, 11 December, 2006), Pisa 2009, pp. 195-238.

characteristics of very well-known authors in the contemporary Italian theatre scene. Even if it is not a complete study in quantitative terms, the results highlight a "theatrical language" that we do not find in other narrative forms. Due to a lack of space, we shall only list some of the most important phenomena observed. According to this investigation, contemporary texts present specific characteristics to be attributed to two distinct but coexistent phenomena in the theatrical event: on the one hand, the mimesis of the spoken; on the other, the emphasis of the deictic and the discursive strategies of the dramatic text. As one would imagine, some of these belong to both categories, but we will distinguish between the two according to the effect they have.

The first category identified by Silvia Calamai at a morphological level is the frequent redundancy of pronominal forms with respect to other categories. This characteristic is strongly attributable to the emphasis on the deictic because theatrical discourse is conducted by people in the *hic et nunc* of the performance. Other phenomena are more attributable to the mimesis of the spoken and are: the use of brief morphological formula ("che cosa" *versus* "che" or *versus* "cosa"); lexical simplification (the use of the pronoun "cui" is rare; "che" instead of "cui" in oblique cases, "anche" preferred to "pure") and the frequency of the actualizing "ci" ("Non ci hai il fiato che puzza"). Likewise, certain choices such as the ethical dative, the use of "mica" and "manco", or "dice" instead of "si dice", just as the circumlocution with "a" instead of the possessive, are attributable to the mimesis of the spoken.

A particular discussion should be dedicated to the choice of the indicative mode to the detriment of the conjunctive, sometimes even at the risk of being grammatically incorrect. Within the *corpus* Silvia Calamai highlights the use of the indicative in the completive verbs of saying and believing ("Pensavo che non c'era bisogno di dirlo"); in the completive verbs of mood ("Non mi piace che Spyrus ti corregge sempre"); in the subjunctive constructed by impersonal verbs of appearance ("Pare che è un figlio di cardinale"); in the conditionals introduced by *basta che* ("Basta che sulla coppola ci metti le…"); and, in an author like Letizia Russo, the imperfect indicative

in place of the conditional ("Non pensavo che ce la facevo"). The use of the indicative in a hypothetical period of unreality is, however, rare.

There is a long list of phenomena that marks theatrical writing at the syntactical level. First and foremost, a predominant parataxis, which results in few or very few subordinations and, at times, a marked segmentation of sentences. As a consequence, subordinate conjunctions are rare and nominal phrases with verb ellipsis occur frequently. Furthermore, we encounter a mix of strategies to emphasize the spoken, which are attributable to both the mimesis of the spoken as well as deictic and discursive strategies. Arguably, in a series of texts, the strategies of emphasis are most likely functional precisely to these discursive strategies of the compression of the spoken and the reinforcement of the illocutionary strength (in Keir Elam's categories). We can see how Calamai pinpoints contrastive topicalization ("I parenti, vogliono dal condominio le chiavi"); the order marked by the phrase with the object in first position ("Un poco di silenzio si potrà avere"); and numerous examples of right dislocation ("Me l'hanno tolta, la casa").

On the other hand, the frequent cases of anacoluthon ("Perché una donna sola su una nave è pericoloso"); the presence of split phrases ("È in quella casa *che* abbiamo fatto tutti i nostri figli") or the use of "è che" to introduce phrases; the great use of "che polivalente" in temporal terms ("Ho cominciato a professare che avevo dodici anni"), explicative or consecutive terms ("Qui noi non possiamo mangiare, che magari tu vorresti pure allungarti") or causal terms ("Ma non è che voglia dirti") are more tied to mimetic characteristics of the spoken. Other phenomena tied to the mimesis of the spoken are the use of an informal or familiar, and in some cases even vulgar, register; the use of few foreignisms; and the frequent use of interjections. Connected to all of this is the almost total absence of aulic and literary voices.

On the stylistic plane, however, the dominant rhetorical figures are attributable to those discursive strategies typical of the dramatic text like repetition and accumulation. In particular, we encounter examples of epanalepsis, anadiplosis, epanadiplosis, real repetitions and

few instances of climax. And, finally, to all of this we must add phenomena like the dialogic structure of short or holophrastic lines, vocal elision, the abbreviation of proper names, and the great use of discourse signals ("insomma", "allora", "vero", "davvero", "ecco"). More tied, however, to the deictic dimension is the great use of deictic expressions, with a frequency that we would not find in normal conversation.

The phenomena described by Calamai can be considered the first signs of a vademecum of dramatic dialogues written in contemporary Italian for the theatre. The most important aspects (morpho-syntactic simplification, informal register, a reduction in the use of verbal tenses, the use of repetition also in a rhetorical sense, a structure segmented by lines, the great use of deictic expressions, strategies of emphasis) are those phenomena that must generally be present in the spoken dialogue of theatrical language. Keir Elam's aforementioned categories, however, represent the characteristics that differentiate the theatrical spoken from the natural. In the passage from one language to the other the translator must be aware of this peculiarity and produce the changes necessary to the different morpho-syntactic systems in the texts that they are to develop.

We believe that it will be opportune to integrate this initial quantitative analysis into an investigation of a *corpus* of texts in two versions – those translated for publication and those for performance – in order to arrive at a descriptive body of rules of the actual tendencies of theatrical translation. This, however, would have been impossible to do here, as it would have gone beyond the scope of the study, which was limited to demonstrating the existence of a theatrical language and not with presenting its rules.

A body of rules which, in the same way as the conventions of contemporary writing already indicated up until this point, should not be considered as a prescriptive constraint upon translation, but as lines of contemporary tendencies, to which, furthermore, a production, or a translator, can follow up to a certain point, making stylistic choices that in certain cases are more oriented to the literary, or of a reduction of the weight of the deictic. One must always remember that the contemporary theatre does not live by prescriptions

but by tendencies, which in some cases may also be rejected for the sake of the performance. The same Bassnett, in underlining the importance of the deictic units identified by Serpieri as theatrical semiological units, relates some translations of Shakespeare into Italian and German, noting how one of the Piccolo Teatro's versions of *King Lear* strongly limited the use of deictics which, in reality, are present to a large degree in Shakespeare's work. In other words, the density of deictic indicators also depends upon directorial choices that intend to either play up or play down the dramatic nature of a text within the conflict underway between the actors. But in the context of classical theatre it is entirely imaginable that a generally well known Shakesperian text will be played more on the level of allusion and cross reference (aesthetic and literary), than on the vicious ongoing conflict.[22]

Beyond the deixis

The phenomena of theatrical deixis are full of indications for translators in a more general sense as well. The spoken context is responsible for many aspects of dramaturgical expression, not only that tied to conversation. I am referring here to the dimensions of corporeality, physicality, and gestural expressiveness that are positively predominant in the culture of the theatre.[23] In the passage from one language to another, the differences between the morpho-syntactic systems and the stylistic conventions can force translators into categorical *shifts*, that is, into making choices that may to a greater or lesser degree underline the deictic and corporeal dimensions. Indeed, that which in one language must be expressed at a syntactic level, in another can fall back into a semantic one. Everything in the theatre is connected to the physicality and to the *hic et nunc* of

[22] Cfr. Susan Bassnett, *Ways Through the Labyrinth*, cit., p. 95.

[23] In this sense, some of Giovanni Nencioni's notes (*op. cit.*, p. 13) are convincing. He indicated how in the theatre, as opposed to literature, isotopy was created within the person of the actor turned character (thus related to a physical fact) who became a semiological body, and not within the textual dimension predominant in literature. See also the following footnote for Antinucci's quotation.

the performance as, to a large degree, a great part of modern drama insists. Taking up one of Antinucci's insights, Elam had already identified the proximity between deixis and corporeality:

> Sulla scena, il rapporto più intimo che mantiene la deissi con i segni extra- o paralinguistici (quindi gestuali, scenici, prossemici, costumici ecc.) è quello con il gesto fisico. Si può considerare la deissi come un punto di contatto fra il codice e i messaggi linguistici da un lato e il corpo agente che li mette in scena dall'altro. Osserva giustamente Antinucci che 'Il ruolo fondamentale della deissi nell'economia della comunicazione linguistica consiste proprio in questo: offrire la possibilità di scambiare informazioni operando sul livello senso-motorio anziché su quello simbolico'. Esiste una interdipendenza indissolubile fra gli indici verbali e i segnali gestuali che li accompagnano.[24]

As Antinucci affirms, the level of the motor skills is a truly preferred channel of communication as it absorbs modalities that in literature are exploited at the verbal-symbolic level. Clearly, in performance, every element that refers to a body, to an actor, to an event, to a gesture cannot but construct and accentuate the drama. An aesthetic of theatrical translation cannot but be an aesthetic of theatrical physicality.

Theatrical speakability's field of application

How can one define these specificities' field of application? Should we consider them applicable to every text, to every age, always and in every case?

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[24] Keir Elam, *Appunti sulla deissi, l'anafora e le trasformazioni nel testo drammatico e sulla scena*, in Alessandro Serpieri *et al.*, *Come comunica il teatro*, cit. The quotation is taken from Francesco Antinucci, *Sulla deissi*, in "Lingua e Stile", IX (1974), n. 2, p. 243: "Within the scene, the most intimate relationship that maintains the deixis with the extra- or paralinguistic signs (therefore gestural, scenic, proxemic, costumic, etc.) is that of the physical gesture. One can consider the deixis as a point of contact between the code and the linguistic messages on the one hand and the representative body on the other. Antinucci rightly observes that "The fundamental role of the deixis in the

Our opinion is simple: the field of application is theatrical dialogue, which does not correspond to drama *tout court*, as we stated at the beginning. One may speak of theatrical dialogue in all instances where a text presents itself as an extremely dense fabric made up of dramatic action and dialogue between actors. In these cases, theatrical dialogue should submit to the phenomena observed up until this point and be elaborated upon as a result. We are speaking of those plays or of those parts of plays where what Keir Elam has defined as proairetic coherence is identifiable. And being a dialogue directed pragmatically toward the confrontation of actors in a specific context, the deictic dimension, as we have seen quoted many times, is fundamental.

According to Serpieri, Elam, and Gulli Pugliatti, this deictic dimension has a specific orientation, which is realized within a single line or group of lines spoken by one character toward another in relation to a place or to a time. Whenever a character addresses another (that is, "orients" his or herself toward another), a new deictic unit is created that in this way becomes the measure of the text's semiological segmentation. This measure is important in terms of translation too, as it establishes the translatable unity of the source text with that of the target text.[25] And as these deictic units are based on dialogue, it is there that deictic orientation and dramatic dialogue coincide.

Elam cites an extreme example of deictic references from Shakespeare's Hamlet, disambiguated by visible gestures on the part of the actors:

> Thus when Polonius issues his famous triple-decker 'index': "Take this from these, if this be otherwise", the accompanying gestures – absolutely indispensable to the sense of the utterance – are inscribed in the language itself, rendering quite redundant the stage directions added by…modern editors.[26]

economy of linguistic communication consists precisely in this: it offers the possibility of exchanging information operating on the level of motor skills as opposed to the level of the symbolic". An indissoluble interdependence exists between the verbal indicators and the gestural signals that accompany them".

[25] With all of the *shifts* that the translator chooses to make and that may render the translated unity of the target text different from that of the source text.

[26] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, cit., p. 127.

Serpieri's theory on deictic orientation is, at heart, also traceable to Stanislavski's theories on theatrical subtext, which had an immense impact of 20th century theatre. Every production begins with the so-called "work at table" in which the director and the actors analyze the "actions" and "reactions" at work within the script and designed by the text, and in this way focus on the web of relations and situations that later are reconstructed and made to come alive in performance.

When it is not possible to verify a deictic orientation, dramatic dialogue as we have understood it up until now is probably not even present; or rather, the text has radically different characteristics that, at base, could be easily ascribable to literary writing. For example, in Serpieri's essay[27] an avant-garde text like Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* is considered by Keir Elam to be deictically segmentable not into dramatic dialogue, but into a unique and meta-theatrical form precisely for its not being made up of dialogue-action between actors, but between actors and the audience; whereas a text like the Living Theatre's *Seven Meditations on Political Sado-Masochism* is considered non-segmentable in an absolute sense.[28]

It is not a matter, however, of isolated cases of a nineteen-seventies' era avant-garde. Clearly contemporary theatre cannot be completely assimilated to dramatic dialogue. There is a part of the theatre that has post-dramatic characteristics, and does not have a dialogue-based text at its center; or, in any case, dramatic dialogue assumes marginal characteristics.

The concept of post-dramatic theatre was formulated by Hans-Thies Lehmann in the essay *Postdramatisches Theater* in order to describe the European and American avant-garde theatre that began in the nineteen-seventies and which aimed at destroying representational pretense, the mimetic creation of a story, as well as being anchored to a dramatic text made up of dialogue. It is a theatre

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[27] Cfr. Alessandro Serpieri *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[28] Cfr. Keir Elam, *Segmentazione di alcuni brani da alcuni testi teatrali*, in Alessandro Serpieri *et al.*, *op. cit.*, in particular p. 123ff. and p. 125ff.

that has stripped itself of dramatic history and mimetic representation. It consists of an extremely varied record of representative modalities. At times the dialogues have not been completely eliminated, but have taken on an extremely minor role and do not follow mimetic logic throughout the entire performance. In the majority of cases, however, in place of dialogue the actors simply talk, at times among themselves, at times turning to the audience in a poetic, political (as in the case of the Living Theatre), narratological or monological fashion. And sometimes they speak to the audience not only through asides or in the manner of the Epic Theatre's allusions (as in the aforementioned case of Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience*).

In this type of theatre the text may be a simple verbal component of a different dramaturgical structuring, for example, of a multimedia type. The words become an internal code, and often a poetic accompaniment, and do not adhere to nor stimulate the dramatic structure. Dramatic structure and performative structure tend to diverge and proceed along parallel paths.

We would therefore tend to preemptively exclude the categories proposed by Keir Elam or Silvia Calamai for all of post-dramatic theatre because they simply do not arise outside of minimal instances of mimetic dialogue between actors, and the categories of *speakability* of *performability* that the translator would have to observe (or break) would thus be invalid.

It should also be added that post-dramatic theatre is rarely translated, and if it is, it is usually done with surtitles. The majority of texts are created by groups or companies that perform them in a (quasi) exclusive manner. It is not a theatre of actors, but of little theatres. The text cannot be extricated from the mise-en-scène, and is therefore difficult to replicate in other languages. Furthermore, there are various authors who are considered to be the precursors of the post-dramatic theatre, or examples of this type of theatre, and who have been translated like Peter Handke, Elfriede Jelinek, or Werner Schwab. Yet, in such cases, we are dealing with "mixed" phenomena that share aspects of both modalities.

From publishing house to performance: for whom does one translate?

If we pass to the context in which a translation arises, the most problematic relationship is that between the translation of a text *of* the theatre and the translation of a text *for* the theatre. The translator may work for a publishing house and ignore the idea of any eventual staging; or, at the opposite pole, may be hired by a director to produce a suitable stage version.

It would appear to be an easily definable context if it were not for the fact that there are numerous cases in between. To what degree will the publisher's translator be involved with a performance, and how will such proximity to the work of the actors and director, with its complex interaction of codes, determine the translator's work? And who will the translator in question be? The same one who is working for the publisher? Or will they be replaced by the director or by others in the director's place? Or placed alongside perhaps?

It is difficult to organize a discussion on that which Bassnett defined a labyrinth in a small amount of space. We will therefore try to sketch only a few challenges. There is no doubt that we are dealing with a true labyrinth of productive codes and contexts, ones in which, however, a large degree of involvement on the part of the translator and others in the production of a specific text for the stage may be assumed.

A foreign theatrical text might initially be developed by a translator on behalf of a publisher who *might* follow the director's re-elaboration throughout the work at table as well as the actors' continuous re-elaborations and minimal variations to the lines and who might, in the end, subject the text to one last process of revision during the actual rehearsals and throughout the play's run.

The degree to which the translator actively participates in these phases depends on the director's sensibility and on the translator themselves as well as their respective ways of working. As one can imagine, it is often chance that decides which direction it will go. The important thing is to recognize that, in the theatre, the director's participation together with other professionals radically transforms the

text in a performance, both giving it a precise interpretation, as well as configuring it through the creative presence of an actor at the center of the performance. This all brings us to consider the work of the director and the mise-en-scène as a *radically new* phase that can no longer be considered only from the textual point of view. The text, within the structure of a performance, is only one of the semiotic vehicles, and the translator, deep down, is concerned only with that. For various reasons that we cannot analyze here, in general the translator's participation in the draft of the "performance text" is rather rare, and is limited to brief moments of discussion related to the director's doubts or to seemingly necessary variations. And yet there are also cases of very strict collaboration where the director has a precise idea of the performance and, above all, a very clear idea of linguistic level required, communicating to the translator precise demands that are repeatedly clarified or negotiated. In this case, the commission proposes more or less precise criteria that are up to the translator to interpret.

Basically, we are talking about performability, or rather, the performability of theatrical translation, which is directly dependent upon the degree of the translator's involvement in the process of the production of the performance. It is clear that a translator cannot imagine a production "in the dark" as it were without any connection to a director and, eventually, to the actors. And therefore, beyond the involvement in the specific productive context, the translator's role will be that of preparing a "speakable" and "performable" text as we have conceived of it up until now, respecting those parameters connected to theatrical dialogue according to current conventions.

If we like, the degree zero of the application of these criteria is the productive context of contemporary theatrical publishing, which, in any event, demands texts that are suitable for performance and easy to insert into a productive context. Experience[29] has taught me that the translator involved in theatrical publishing must remain in a

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[29] The attention of Umberto Eco and other important translation theorists – one thinks of Meschonnic – to practical experience as a source of truth within the realm of translation cannot be ignored.

sort of no-man's land: ahead of the reality of performance, but respectful of the criteria of theatrical speakability.

Nevertheless, Susan Bassnett is right to establish a sharp distinction between the two processes: the translation of a text for publication and that of a script for performance. And it is also possible to seek, as she does, the completeness of the text destined for reading; and yet, at this point, such a text speaks to a reader who is also an expert in matters regarding the theatre, who is capable of imagining both the performative context and its verbal challenges. A text that is also compatible with a reading aimed at performance, and which can easily be re-worked into a spectacular text.

Translation from the Italian: Alexander Booth